

### ALCOHOL USE AMONG YOUTH INTERVIEWED AT JUVENILE HALL

According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism ([www.niaaa.nih.gov](http://www.niaaa.nih.gov)), alcohol use during the teenage years can interfere with normal adolescent brain development and increase the risk of developing alcohol use disorders. In addition, underage drinking can contribute to a range of acute consequences, including injuries, violent crime victimization, and serious problems in school. As part of the Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) program that SANDAG conducts annually, adults and juveniles arrested and booked into local detention facilities are interviewed regarding their recent drug use histories, as well as other risk-taking behaviors. With the results from interviews conducted with juveniles in 2014 soon to be released, this CJ Flash highlights data related to alcohol use by these youth.

- About one in four (26%) youth reported that alcohol was the first substance they had ever tried. This percentage has decreased over time (from 39% in 2010), with more youth reporting their first experimentation was with marijuana. However, across this sample of 134 youth, almost all (90%) had reported ever trying alcohol and two-thirds (66%) reported binge drinking (defined as having five or more drinks on one occasion).
- Two-thirds (67%) of those interviewed between the ages of 11 and 13 had ever tried alcohol, compared to 80 percent of those 14 or 15, and 97 percent of those 16 and older.
- What was the typical pattern of alcohol use? On average, youth were 12.8 years old when they had their first drink, and binge drinking started about six months later (at 13.4). Around four in every five (81%) who had tried alcohol reported using it in the past year, and the average number of days in the past month these youth had used alcohol was 6.2.
- Regardless of the youth's history of recent use, about half (54%) thought alcohol was "not bad" or "just a little bad" for them.
- Around three-quarters (77%) of the youth said that it was "very easy" or "easy" to obtain alcohol. When asked how they had obtained it the last time they used it, 32 percent said someone over 21 had bought it for them, 23 percent said someone over 21 had given it to them, 16 percent said someone under 21 gave it to them, 9 percent bought it at a store, 9 percent took it from a store, 7 percent took it from a residence (most often their own), and 4 percent got it some other way.
- Around one in ten (8%) reported they crossed the border to Mexico to obtain alcohol, with the first time being around the age of 14.6.
- Around one in three (32%) youth reported their parent(s) have abused alcohol, but this varied significantly by whether the youth reported binge drinking themselves. Specifically, those who had a history of binge drinking were more likely to report their parents abused alcohol (40%), compared to those who did not report this abuse (6%).
- Youth who reported binge drinking were also significantly more likely to report they had used marijuana (70% vs. 47%) and meth (25% vs. 6%) in the past 30 days, previously abused prescription (51% vs. 6%) and over-the-counter drugs (42% vs. 9%), had a history of truancy (94% vs. 72%), and previously had suicidal thoughts (22% vs. 3%).

While recent changes in laws related to marijuana use in some states have led to more focus on this substance use by teens, it is important to remember that alcohol is the most commonly used and abused drug by youth in the United States and is responsible for more than 4,300 annual deaths among underage youth ([www.cdc.gov/alcohol](http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol)). To access other statistics from the SAM project, please visit [www.sandag.org/cj](http://www.sandag.org/cj).